

REMARKS

Applicants cancel claims 15-18 and 26-28 and amend claim 19 such that claims 1-14 and 19-25 are pending in this application.

Applicants initially note with appreciation that the Examiner has allowed claims 1-6, 9-14, 20, and 22-23, and has identified allowable subject matter in claim 19. Applicants respectfully submit that claims 7, 8, 21, 24, and 25 would also be allowable if the Examiner's objections to these claims are overcome.

Claim Objections

The Examiner objects to claims 7, 21, and 24 under 37 C.F.R. 1.75(c) as being in improper dependent form for failing to limit the subject matter of a previous claim. In addition, the Examiner also identifies that claims 8 and 25 are objected to for being dependent upon objected to claims 7 and 24, respectively.

Claims 1 and 20 include means plus function limitations, and claim 7, which depends from claim 1, and claims 21 and 24, which depend from claim 20, recite structure that defines (i.e., narrows) the means plus function limitation of the independent claims. If the Examiner contends that the means plus function limitation is not being narrowed in the dependent claim because the structure of the dependent claim is the only structure identified in the specification, Applicants respectfully disagree. Whether or not the structure recited in the dependent claim is the only means identified in the specification for accomplishing the function identified in the independent claim, the dependent claim is indeed narrower. The literal scope of the means plus function clause includes the structure for performing that function identified in the specification *and equivalents thereof*, whereas the literal scope of the structure identified in the dependent claim includes only that recited structure. Therefore, dependent claims 7, 21, and 24 are proper dependent claims because they are narrower in literal scope compared to their respective independent claims. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request the Examiner to withdraw the objections to claims 7, 8, 21, 24, and 25.

The Examiner objects to claims 15 and 18. Applicants cancel claims 15 and 18 without prejudice. These objections are now mute.

The Examiner objects to claim 19 for failing to provide sufficient antecedent basis for the limitation "the splice". In response, Applicants amend claim 19 to address the Examiner's

concerns. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request the Examiner to withdraw the objection to claim 19.

Claim Rejections – 35 U.S.C. §§102 and 103

The Examiner rejects claims 15-18 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by United States Patent No. 5,636,021. In addition, the Examiner rejects claims 26-28 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over the '021 patent in view of United States Patent No. 5,311,592.

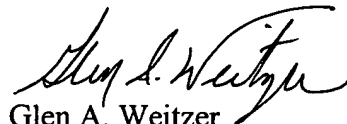
Applicants cancel claims 15-18 and 26-28 without prejudice, thereby making the rejections mute.

Comments in Response to Examiner's Reasons for Allowance

The reasons set forth by the Examiner refer only to some of the features in the independent claims, and are not the only reasons that all of the claims are allowable. Each of the independent and dependent claims include additional patentable features or combinations of features not mentioned by the Examiner.

The Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned attorney should the Examiner determine that such action would facilitate the prosecution and allowance of the present application.

Respectfully submitted,



Glen A. Weitzer
Reg. No. 48,337

Docket No.: 43153-9062-00
Michael Best & Friedrich LLP
100 East Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202-4108

(414) 271-6560